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TO:	CHAIR AND MEMBERS PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE MEETING ON SEPTEMBER 24, 2012
FROM:	J. M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER
SUBJECT:	IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW TRAIL STANDARDS IN ENVIRONMENTALLY SIGNIFICANT AREAS

RECOMMENDATION

That, on the recommendation of the Managing Director of Planning and City Planner, the following information report **BE RECEIVED** regarding the status of the application of the new "Planning and Design Standards for Trails in Environmentally Significant Areas" for current and proposed ESA planning projects.

PREVIOUS REPORTS RELEVANT TO THIS MATTER

At the meeting of Municipal Council held on June 26 and 27, 2012, it was resolved: That, on the recommendation of the Director of Land Use Planning and City Planner, the following actions (a to h) be taken with respect to the new Planning and Design Standards for Trails in Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs). This report addresses clauses b), f), and g):

- b) An ESA Trails Advisory Group **BE ESTABLISHED** representing all user groups with diverse membership, including the Thames Valley Trail Association, to comment on any trail related issues in ESAs that were not addressed or contemplated in the most current Conservation Master Plans (CMP);
- f) the Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to report back in September, 2012 on the status of the application of the new Trail Standard for current and proposed ESA planning projects; and
- g) the Civic Administration **BE DIRECTED** to investigate an expanded role for the planned ESA Trails Advisory Group (Team) and report back on the potential structure for an Advisory Committee on ESAs.

ITEMS ADDRESSED IN THIS REPORT

ITEM b) and g) STRUCTURE AND TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR AN ESA TRAILS ADVISORY GROUP

Appendix A presents a working draft for a term of reference for the proposed ESA Trails Advisory Group. Representation will be from City staff from Environmental and Parks Planning, Environmental and Ecological Planning Advisory Committee (EEPAC), Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), Upper Thames River Conservation Area (UTRCA), Nature London, Thames Valley Trail Association (TVTA). Members will meet on site, as required, to discuss and agree upon solutions to trail design, location, use and/or maintenance problems not contemplated by

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any current Conservation Master Plan.

ITEM f) STATUS OF CURRENT AND PROPOSED ESA TRAIL PLANNING PROJECTS

Current Projects

1. **Medway North Trail Planning** - Final management zone map has been completed and the evaluation of trail options is being screened through the environmental and social criteria to select a preferred option. This planning assessment will be posted on-line and circulated for public and EEPAC comments. A public meeting will follow in the late fall with anticipated completion in January 2013.
2. **Coves ESA Phase 1 Conservation Strategy** – A draft strategy has been prepared and circulated for review by the implementation committee. A public meeting to present the findings of the ecological inventory, proposed management zones and environmental management strategy will be held in October, 2012.
3. **Dingman Creek – Boler Mountain Lands** – The City has completed a Subject Lands Status Report in the Dingman Creek subwatershed that encompass the Boler Mountain property and adjacent City owned lands and lands outside the Urban Growth Boundary. The ecological inventory and assessment of lands was used to evaluate and delineate components of the natural heritage system and recommend management zones for future trail planning and development activities. The report will be finalized by December 2012.
4. **Westminster Ponds ESA** – A Council recommendation was passed in May, 2012 directing Civic Administration to work with the Westminster Working Group to develop a proposal and business case for a multi-use pathway from the Westminster neighbourhood to Commissioners Road. City staff are also working with CNR to explore a potential “safe” crossing of the railway line at Dayus Creek. Staff have established preliminary management zones to assist this process. Consultants have been retained to undertake a preliminary inventory and site report to confirm management zones and to identify potential trail options. Staff will meet with the community in October to discuss these two initiatives.

Proposed Projects

1. **Coves ESA Phase 2 Conservation Master Plan** – Related to project 2, above. Phase 2 of the Conservation Master Plan will begin following the public meeting to present the results of Phase 1. Work with a Local Advisory Group to develop a trail plan and establish implementation recommendations and priorities is anticipated to be complete by April 2013.
2. **Medway Valley South ESA CMP** – City staff will begin to develop a terms of reference for the new Conservation Master Plan process, in consultation with local community groups. Approval of the TOR in the fall of 2012, with life science inventory to begin early spring 2013.
3. **Meadowlily ESA CMP** – In the fall of 2013, City staff will begin to develop a terms of reference (TOR) for the new Conservation Master Plan process, in consultation with local community groups. Approval of the TOR in the late fall of 2013, with life science inventory to begin early spring 2014. If possible, staff will endeavour to begin the inventory work in 2013.
4. **Sifton Bog ESA** – The long term safety and continued use of the section of boardwalk leading from the mixed swamp through the bog to the floating platform on Redmonds Pond needs to be addressed in relation to the new Management Zones as determined by staff and consultants. A vegetation inventory of permanent vegetation plots and deer exclosure plots to monitor changes in the sensitive bog environment in relation to adjacent land uses, deer browse and trail use will be undertaken in the spring –summer of 2013. Staff are working with City Transportation and Stormwater Engineers, consultants and the UTRCA hydrogeologist with respect to managing hydrological

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impacts related to the Oxford Street widening project.

5. **Kains Woods ESA** – The City will work with the Trails Advisory Group to develop options for crossing the first steep ravine leading into Kains Woods from Oxford Street. This work will commence when the EEPAC has met and Terms of Reference for the TAG accepted and appointees selected, sometime in October – November 2012.

CONCLUSION

The approval of the new Trail Standards for ESAs has met with the approval of the public and conservation organizations that have vested interests in the long-term protection of these unique natural areas by identifying management zones that permit certain types of uses appropriate to the sensitivity of the area.

This report presents a summary of four projects currently in progress that can be concluded with the preparation of final trail plans, and five more projects that can be initiated following the process outlined in the Trail Standards.

PREPARED BY:	SUBMITTED BY:
B.M. BERGSMA M.Sc. ECOLOGIST PLANNER	A.W. MACPHERSON MANAGER - PARKS PLANNING & DESIGN
RECOMMENDED BY:	
JOHN M. FLEMING MANAGING DIRECTOR, PLANNING AND CITY PLANNER	

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APPENDIX A

**Trails Advisory Group for Environmentally Significant Areas
Terms of Reference**

1.0 Background

The Trails Advisory Group (TAG) will assist with the implementation of the Planning and Design Standards for Trails in Environmentally Significant Areas (ESAs) as approved by City Council on June 27, 2012. The Council resolution specifies that; *an ESA Trails Advisory Group be established representing all user groups with diverse membership, including the Thames Valley Trail Association, to comment on any trail related issues in ESAs that were not addressed or contemplated in the most current Conservation Master Plans.*

ESAs are identified in the City’s Official Plan as areas that contain natural features and perform ecological functions that warrant their protection in a natural state. Publicly-owned ESAs have a purpose and function distinct from all other publicly owned open space parks. Permitted uses, access, and the provision of recreational activities within ESAs are governed by the Environmental Policies of the Official Plan for significant components of the natural heritage system. These policies and practices must be consistent with the Provincial Policy Statement issued under authority of Section 3 of the Planning Act to protect essential ecological processes and natural values of provincial interest and the quality of the natural environment from incompatible development and site alteration.

Hiking trails on natural surfaces are not considered development or site alteration. However, as soon as more substantive trails and surface types and the installation of structures are required, some site alteration in the form of grading, excavation or fill will be necessary. In these instances where site alteration is proposed, it is the responsibility of the City to demonstrate that there will be “no loss of ecological features or functions for which the area has been identified” (PPS, 2005). Meeting the test of the Provincial Policy Statement is the main reason why trail planning and design within ESAs must be based first on ecological protection through avoidance of impacts, and secondly, the application of appropriate mitigation where necessary to avoid degradation of natural features or loss of ecological functions.

2.0 Purpose

The purpose of the TAG is to provide comment on trail related issues in London’s ESAs that were not addressed or contemplated in the most current Conservation Master Plan (CMP) for each ESA. It serves as an information conduit with respective organization members and leverages resources within the community. The TAG serves as the communication link for local trails volunteers and stakeholders. The expected benefits of such a strategy include sharing expertise and perspectives leading to greater understanding and cooperation among stakeholders.

Policies for trail planning and design are implemented through the CMP process which typically includes consultation with Environmental and Ecological Planning Advisory Committee (EEPAC), public participation meetings, and a public meeting before Planning Environment Committee. As most CMPs include recommendations for implementation over a 10 year period, and ecosystems are by their nature dynamic, situations will arise where alternative trail alignments or solutions may be required to address a change in the ecosystem. The TAG will provide advice to meet the

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requirement for public engagement for these situations where the trail design was not originally addressed or contemplated in the approved CMP.

The TAG is an advisory body and is not an approval authority.

3.0 Responsibilities and Functions

The TAG will provide timely, consistent and effective trail planning and design comments by:

- (a) Reviewing and suggesting creative trail design responses to the identified problems in the establishment of trails and trail structures;
- (b) Ensuring proposed trails and trail structures are consistent with the Council adopted Planning and Design Standards for Trails in Environmentally Significant Areas.
- (c) Fostering an effective working relationship with all trail user groups and organizations; and
- (d) Broadening public discussion about trails and ESAs in London and strengthening public input.

4.0 Membership

The TAG shall be comprised of:

- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from TVTA
- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from EEPAC
- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from Nature London
- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from UTRCA
- 1 representative and 1 alternate representative from Accessibility Advisory Committee
- City Ecologist and City Landscape Architect

5.0 Terms of Office

Service on the TAG is a 2 year appointment confirmed by October 1st. TAG representatives shall serve without compensation. Appointment to the TAG will be by nomination from within each of the user groups and organizations. Representatives (or their alternate representative) must be available and provide their own transportation to attend all meetings of the TAG.

6.0 Processes / Meetings

- The TAG will meet as required, usually onsite, to address specific trail projects and identified problem trail sites in ESAs that were not originally contemplated or addressed in the current ESA Master Plans.
- City staff will set the meeting agenda, location and provide background information, maps and photos to facilitate meetings.
- The TAG will strive for consensus in making decisions. However, if consensus is not reached after significant effort, a majority of the TAG members present will be required to make a decision.

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Planner: B. Bergsma

- City staff will take TAG meeting minutes and summarize the results and distribute the minutes to TAG members within two weeks after TAG meetings.
- The TAG representatives will liaise with members of the public as well as their respective stakeholder groups in order to share information both to and from the TAG.
- Communication between EEPAC and TAG and back will be through the City Ecologist.